SERVANTS

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MARY TODD LINCOLN

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Mary Todd Lincoln

Servants

Excerpts from newspapers and other sources

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LINCOLN LORE

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COLORED PEOPLE WHO SERVED THE LINCOLNS

They Knew Lincoln is a sort of Who's Who among colored people associated as servants with Mr. and Mrs. Lincoln. The author of the book, Dr. John E. Washington, also a member of the negro race, has become a servant to all of us in tracing the interesting contacts which his people made with the Emancipator and his wife.

William Slade
Confidential Messenger

Slade seemed to have been in charge of all of the colored help at the White House, he bought the food and many times planned the menu for small numbers of guests the Lincolns may have been entertaining. He often served as valet to Mr. Lincoln and made himself generally useful about the White House. Slade's wife was named Josephine, and there were three children, Katherne, Andrew and Jessie. Slade accompanied Lincoln to Gettysburg and Judge Wills in his statement about Mr. Lincoln's visit in his home at this time mentions the negro servant, William. Slade made his will on March 5, 1865, a few weeks before Lincoln died and he passed away on March 16, 1868.

Rosetta Wells
Seamstress

Rosetta did the plain serving at the White House, taking care of the bed clothes and such darning and mending as was necessary. She spoke highly of Mrs. Lincoln, with respect to her attitude toward the servants, and was especially complimentary of Mr. Lincoln, remarking that, "He treated his servants like people."

Cornelia Mitchell
Cook

Cornelia was cook at the White House when the Lincolns arrived and as might be expected, she was retained as she was noted for her savory dishes. She was from an old southern family which, of course, would please Mrs. Lincoln, who had not always been fortunate in finding servants of Cornelia's type out in the Illinois country.

Peter Brown
Butler

Peter Brown was another one of the servants of the White House who came there during the Buchanan administration, and remained through the Lincoln regime. One of the impressive facts about the colored servants at the Executive Mansion is that they usually made a lifetime job of it. Peter had a son named Robert, who also did some work as a lad for the Lincolns.

William Johnson
Valet

William Johnson, as far as we know was the only colored person who Lincoln brought on from Springfield to work in the White House. The old colored help in the White House were of light complexion but Johnson was a very dark-skinned man and the rest of the servants made it so uncomfortable for Johnson that Mr. Lincoln was obliged to find another place for him. Johnson went to work for Lincoln in Springfield, Illinois, in March 1860, but on March 16, 1861, the President wrote this letter to one of his cabinet members:

"Hon. Gideon Welles:

"Dear Sir: The bearer (William) is a servant who has been with me sometime and in whom I have confidence as to his integrity and faithfulness. He wishes to enter your service. The difference of color between him and the other servants is the cause of our separation. If you can give him employment you will confer a favor on

"Yours truly,
"A. Lincoln"

Although apparently not successful in finding a place in the Navy Department he was employed by the Treasury Department and he died in service on January 28, 1864. Mr. Lincoln's great kindness to this colored man is revealed in several authentic notes mentioning him, discovered by Dr. Washington. It was undoubtedly William who was sick with the smallpox, whom a newspaper correspondent refers to in a story about the President taking charge of the laborer's salary and making such disposition of it as the invalid Johnson advised.

Solomon Johnson
Barber

Solomon was the successor of William Johnson and was also recommended by President Lincoln to fill William's position in the Treasury Department. He became the barber of Mr. Lincoln, attending to this task along with his treasury job. It is stated that he was the first colored man ever appointed to a clerkship in any of the government departments. Solomon was born in Petersburg, Virginia, in 1842 and died in Washington, November 24, 1885.

Elizabeth Keckley
Modiste

The most interesting character described by Dr. Washington in his book is Elizabeth Keckley, modiste for Mrs. Lincoln. Mrs. Keckley was born in Virginia in 1818, the only child of a slave of light complexion, named Agnes. When Elizabeth was eighteen years old she was presented by her owner to his friend Alexander Kirkland, a white man by whom she had an only child according to her own testimony. Elizabeth Keckley's line of descent made her at least three-fourths white. She was an excellent seamstress and when in St. Louis she and her son became the slaves of Anne P. Garland. From her Mrs. Keckley purchased her freedom and also the freedom of her only son George, who was almost white. This promissory note indicates the transaction:

"I promise to give Lizzie and her son George their freedom on the payment of $1200. Anne P. Garland, June 27, 1855."

It was in the spring of 1860 that Mrs. Keckley moved to Baltimore and six weeks later went to Washington to make her home. When the Lincolns arrived a year later, Mrs. Keckley was recommended to Mrs. Lincoln as a seamstress. Mrs. Keckley's son George, who was in Wilberforce University, left college to enter in the war as "a white" and was killed in the battle of Lexington, Missouri.

After the death of the President Mrs. Keckley still kept in touch with Mrs. Lincoln and acted as an adviser in Mrs. Lincoln's attempt to sell many of her possessions, at which time several letters passed between them.

By far the most important discovery made by Dr. Washington is identification of the man who assisted Elizabeth Keckley in the much discussed book "Behind the Scenes," which bears her name as author. The evidence that James Redpath was the leading literary genius who collaborated with Elizabeth Keckley in her sensational book is proved beyond a question of a doubt.

Mrs. Keckley was very much provoked when the publishers published the personal correspondence which passed between Mrs. Lincoln and her as she understood the personal letters were not to be printed.

Mrs. Keckley continued her sewing until 1892 when she went to Wilberforce University to teach domestic art. She lived until May 24, 1907, when she passed away in the city of Washington, leaving her few possessions to the "National Association for the Relief of Destitute Colored Women and Children."

MARY TODD LINCOLN

A BIOGRAPHY

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country, and in 1846, after war had been declared against Mexico, he cut short his congressional term, returned to Springfield, and was raising a troop of Illinois volunteers when his namesake was born. By the spring of 1847, Edward Dickinson Baker was the local hero of the Battle of Cerro Gordo, while in Springfield Eddie Lincoln was turning out to be a sickly baby.[14]

AFTER the move to her own home at Eighth and Jackson and the birth of her second son, Mary Lincoln disappeared—at least from historical view. Her world narrowed, and behind the wooden doors with the now-famous gold plate marker engraved "A. Lincoln," life became a seamless experience, filled with the recurring domestic tasks that a neighbor described as "the little world of housekeeping cares and run-about children." Neither awe-inspiring nor exciting, such matters are not usually the stuff of which biographical drama is created. Even today, when domesticity has emerged as a respectable historical topic, its allure is only collectively established, and a deep suspicion of home-making as trivial and mundane remains. It is, after all, women's work. Still to exorcise its performance from the life of a family-centered woman like Mary Todd Lincoln is like omitting politics from a chronicle of her husband. What is significant is not so much what she did, but rather how she accomplished these affairs of the home and what they meant to her.

For example, many middle-class women of her time followed Lydia Sigourney's snobbery that they were little "more than galley slaves without a domestic." Certainly the ladies of Springfield, especially those on the Hill like her sister Elizabeth, felt so, for they searched endlessly for servants, even importing Irish girls from New York through the Women's Protective Emigration Society. By 1850 nearly one out of every four of the town's households included a live-in female, usually under twenty-one and often German- or Irish-born. To their employers these maids delivered respectability as well as leisure.[15]

Throughout her life (and her years in the White House were no exception), Mary Lincoln did more of her own work than her economic position warranted or her husband recommended. "By the way," wrote Lincoln in 1848, "you do not intend to do without a girl, because the one you had left you. Get another as soon as you can to take charge of the codgers." At a time when Elizabeth Edwards depended on two Irish-born servants, a laborer, and two Kentucky slaves (Illinois was a

free state, but evidently Edwards believed slavery a permanent condition and so described their black household members to the census taker) and even indigent Frances Wallace could not get along without her German girl, their sister Mary had only occasional assistance.[16]

Mary Lincoln's critics have held that her bad temper drove off her domestic workers, but such judgments remove her from her time and place. Everyone had difficulty keeping hired girls. In fact, the entire problem of finding and retaining good domestic help was a chronic concern for middle-class women. In Catharine Beecher's authoritative *Treatise on Domestic Economy* the issue merited two chapters, one encouraging servants to stay where they were and the other exhorting in employers the good temper that Mary Lincoln never achieved if the potatoes were undercooked or the knickknacks in the parlor broken. Because she frequently depended on young local women who traded domestic work for board and a dollar a week, rather than on dependent, live-in, immigrant women, she had a higher turnover than some, though by no means all, employers.

Unlike the well-trained slaves of her childhood recollection, the independent daughters of Sangamon County's farmers required constant supervision in specific tasks such as the seasonal exigencies of housecleaning. Hired girls did not consider themselves servants, and they did not expect to be in service long, as immigrant women did. Foreign visitors were not alone in their dismay at the insolence of American servants who expected to eat with the family. "They are," confessed one observer, "too thoroughly American to live with." Consequently nineteenth-century domestic life resonated with angry encounters between proud native-born single women temporarily in service and imperious matrons intent on training ladies' maids.[17]

Among Mary Lincoln's hired girls was Lincoln's cousin Harriet Hanks, who sometime in the early 1840s arrived from the country to go to school at the Springfield Female Seminary and to help out in the house. Later as Harriet Chapman, the wife of a Charleston, Illinois, dentist, she provided William Herndon with a devastating portrait of Mary Lincoln. She would freely give information about Lincoln, she said, but "would rather say nothing of his wife as I could say but little in her favor." Twenty years later Herndon promoted this statement into evidence that Mary Lincoln had attempted to make a slave of Lincoln's cousin.[18]

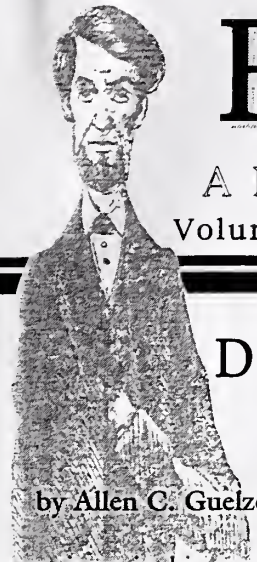
But Mary Lincoln's treatment of Harriet Hanks was common enough. "She always talked to us," complained a similarly aggrieved hired girl

of her employer, "as if we had no feelings and I was never so unhappy in my life as while living with her." Wrote another: "I have been a servant with many Christians; I have seen many things; I cannot turn to Christianity after this."[19] It is more a comment on the structure of American domestic work than a defense of Mary Lincoln to suggest that the tribulations of young Harriet Hanks with her mistress were typical.

Once when Mary Lincoln was pregnant, she did employ a live-in servant. The 1850 census listed eighteen-year-old Irish-born Catherine Gordon as a member of the household at Eighth and Jackson, and the state census of 1855 indicates that a female between ten and twenty slept at the Lincolns'. Most likely it was the feckless Catherine who inspired Mary Lincoln's comment to her half sister Emilie: "If some of you Kentuckians, had to deal with 'the wild Irish,' as we housekeepers are sometimes called upon to do, the south would certainly elect Mr. Fillmore [the anti-Catholic, anti-immigrant Know-Nothing presidential candidate] next time."[20] And it was probably Catherine who left her window open at night in order to entertain her boyfriends.

Sometimes these girls stayed for two seasons, and Mary Lincoln reported that one "very faithful servant" had become as "submissive as possible." At other times she depended on Springfield's other minorities. In 1849 a group of religious exiles from Portugal had settled in the community, and its wives and daughters were soon at work in low-paying domestic jobs. Mary Lincoln had a long relationship with one of these women, to whom she entrusted the dreaded Monday chore of washing and ironing. Later this woman described Mary Lincoln as "taking no sassy talk but if you are good to her, she is good to you and a friend to you." And from Springfield's black community she employed Mariah Vance twice a week for many years, but after two weeks of undercooked potatoes and watery gravy, she fired another black woman in the shrew's voice that resounded across Jackson and up Eighth Streets. Frequently she had no one because there was no one to have, the demand for domestics having outrun the supply. By the 1850s the daughters of Sangamon County's farmers could get better jobs running sewing machines in the new clothing factory.[21]

Mary Lincoln on occasion did not have help because she refused to pay the market price, and it is her parsimony more than her bad temper that her employment record reveals. She had grown up in a household where no money changed hands for service far superior to that rendered by the Catherine Gordons or Harriet Hankses about whom



For the People

A Newsletter of the Abraham Lincoln Association

Volume 3, Number 3 Autumn 2001 Springfield, Illinois

Did the Lincoln Family Employ a Slave in 1849–1850?

by Allen C. Guelzo

Four times in his great debates with Stephen A. Douglas, Abraham Lincoln fended off Douglas's accusation that the abolition of slavery would lead to the wholesale social and sexual mixing of the races. Few white Americans in the mid-nineteenth century were free from the obsession that race, color, and racial boundaries were uncrossable, and Douglas knew how much damage he could do by implicating Lincoln's opposition to slavery with that fear. But Lincoln disarmed Douglas with a simple logic that anyone could grasp: "I do not understand that because I do not want a negro woman for a slave I must necessarily want her for a wife. So it seems to me quite possible for us to get along without making either slaves or wives of negroes."

It was an important point to make in the undecided racial climate of Illinois, since it damped down the anxieties of white Illinoisans that abolition was only the beginning of a path that led to the racist bogeyman of racial miscegenation. But was Lincoln being entirely forthright when he claimed, "I certainly never have had a black woman for . . . a slave"? The answer to that question may hang on the uncertain status of a black woman only eight years in Lincoln's past, a domestic named Ruth Stanton.

Over the years, many critics of Lincoln have pointed out that his antislavery convictions, at least before 1854 and the Kansas-Nebraska Act, were certainly less public, and perhaps less fervent, than they were afterwards. Beside Lincoln's early 1837 protest (with Judge Daniel Stone) against the "injustice and bad policy" of slavery sits Lincoln's apparent indifference to the fate of Jane Bryant and her children in *Matson* v. *Rutherford* (1847). Beside his friendship for individual Springfield blacks like William Florville sits his noncommittal attitude toward the attempts of Springfield blacks to organize for abolition. At their most acerbic, critics of Lincoln blame him for actually condoning slavery while in the midst of abolishing it, by offering to pay Kentucky Judge George Robertson "any sum not exceeding five hundred dollars" for a slave who was at the center of a politically contentious tug-of-war between Kentucky's civil and military authorities, so that the slaves could then be legally freed. No one yet, however, has actually been able to pin on Lincoln the accusation that he actually owned slaves or used the labor of slaves.

But that may depend on the case of Ruth Stanton, and the unusual autobiographical interview she gave in 1894 to a reporter for the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* ("She Nursed Bob Lincoln. Aunt Ruth Stanton Took Him to School When a Boy. She is a Janitress Here Now," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, November 25, 1894). Stanton was one of at least two black domestics employed by the Lincoln family in the 1840s, but little is known about her, in contrast to Maria Vance, who had a sensational set of memoirs ghost-written for her. In the 1894 interview, Stanton claimed to have been born as Ruth Burns in 1835 or 1836 "in Madison County, Ills." She originally worked for the family of John Bradford in Springfield. "Mrs. Lincoln belonged to the Episcopal Church, and so did the Bradfords," and eventually "Mrs. Bradford sent me over to help Mrs. Lincoln every Saturday, for she had no servant and had to do her own housework." Then, in 1849, at age fourteen, Ruth Burns was sent by the Bradfords "to live with the Lincolns." It could not have been a difficult transition. John Bradford's bindery business had retained Lincoln as its attor-

John Bradford

ney in 1846, and Bradford would later describe to Jesse Weik how, when Lincoln was absent from Springfield, he would invite "Mrs. Lincoln to accompany me and my family in a drive to the country." It was to the Bradfords that Mary Lincoln made her famous remark that, "One thing is certain; if Mr. Lincoln should happen to die, his spirit will never find me living outside the boundaries of a slave State."

Ruth Stanton's interview yielded a

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Did the Lincoln Family Employ a Slave in 1849–1850?

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series of picturesque views of the Lincoln household in the year after Abraham Lincoln returned from his solitary term in Congress, including a surprisingly sunny view of Mary Lincoln.

I scrubbed the floors and waited on the table and helped Mrs. Lincoln to clean the dishes and do the washing. She did all the upstairs work, made clothes for the boys, Robert and Willie [since William Wallace Lincoln was not born until December, 1850, Stanton may have been remembering Edward Baker Lincoln, who died in 1850, as "Willie"] and cooked the meals. Mr. Lincoln was a very good and kind man, but I don't remember anything particular about him, for I was very young. He was a very tall man. That's all I can remember of him. He used to be at his office all the day long and I did not see much of him, but I never expected to see him the President of the United States.

Mrs. Lincoln was a very nice lady. She worked hard and was a good church member. Every Thursday the Sewing Society of the Episcopal Church would meet at Mrs. Lincoln's house and make clothes for the very poor people. She was very plain in her ways, and I remember that she used to go to church wearing a cheap calico dress and a sun-bonnet. She didn't have silk or satin dresses. The children, Robert 6 years old, and Willie a few years younger, were very good boys. I used to take care of them, for they were too small to go to school. We would play around the street of Springfield, and the white children would throw stones at the colored children. I was as bad as any of the white children at throwing, because I lived so much with white people I thought I was white.

Sometimes Mrs. Lincoln would catch me and the boys throwing at colored children, then she would call 'Ruth!'

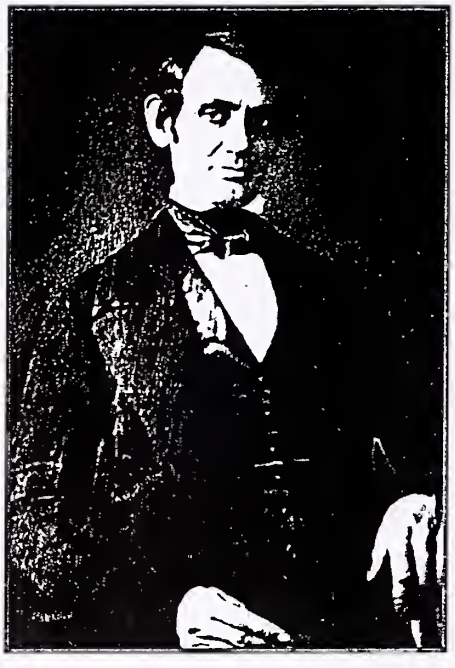
'Mam,' I would say.

'What are you throwing at those children for, aren't you colored?'

'Yes, mam, but I am not black like them!'"

Ruth Stanton stayed with the Lincolns "about a year." The presumption has been that she was a free person of color. But there are circumstances concerning her arrival and her departure from the Lincolns that raise some questions about this status.

In her interview, Ruth Stanton claimed, "my parents were free." But Ruth herself was "bound out to Gen[eral James] Semple's family, for my mother used to belong to them." Indeed they did. James Semple had been born in Kentucky in 1798, where he practiced law and was commissioned in the Kentucky militia. He moved permanently to Edwardsville, Illinois in 1827, and served in the Illinois House of Representatives from 1826 until 1833 (putting in a brief stint as an officer in the Black Hawk War). Semple was appointed as a Democrat to fill the vacant United States Senate seat of Samuel McRoberts in 1843, and it was at that point, "when Gen. Semple became a Senator," that Ruth Burns "was sent to Springfield to live with the family of John Bradford, who was married to Gen. Semple's sister." John S. Bradford, in fact, did marry Adaline M. Semple on July 14, 1841, and it was while working for the Bradfords after 1843 that Ruth Burns "first got to know the Lincolns."



Abraham and Mary Todd Lincoln, circa 1846

The question is, what was the eight-year-old Ruth Burns's legal status at the time that she arrived in Springfield? The Bradfords did not move to Springfield until December 1840, just missing the 1840 census, and therefore giving us no glimpse of Ruth Stanton or (as the census-taker would have) her legal status. But if we suppose that her parents, who "were free," originally arrived in Illinois from Kentucky with James Semple as slaves in 1827, then Ruth Burns (who did not, significantly, claim to have been born free) may have been born under provisions of Article 6, section 3, of the Illinois Public and General Statute Laws (1836) which bound her as an 'indentured servant" until age eighteen. Until that time, the Semples or Bradfords could hire her out to families such as the Lincolns (Lincoln's in-laws, the Edwards and Todds both employed "indentured" black domestics). This may be the central fact packed into her descriptions of he places of employment with the Bradfords and the Lincolns as places to which she was "sent." If not legally or actually a slave, Ruth Burns may have been, in the year she worked for the Lincolns, the next closest thing.

Such a speculation could be clinched another way if the 1850 census also allowed us to track Ruth Burns. But again, she does not appear on the census returns for either the Lincoln of the Bradford households (although curiously, the census makes

no mention of any African-Americans in these households, either). What we do know is that Ruth Burns returned to work for the Semple family, and moved with Semple's son-in-law, Napoleon Mulligan, to St. Louis. There, she married William Stanton, and appears as William Stanton's widow in the 1888 St. Louis city directory.

This does not, by any stretch of the imagination, make Abraham Lincoln into a slaveholder, nor does it even necessarily prove that, in the case of at least one black woman, Lincoln repeatedly told an untruth about not wanting a black woman for a slave. Rather, it underscores the uncertain fluidity of Illinois law concerning people of color. Although Illinois was technically a free state, it had nearly adopted a slave code with the proposed state constitution of 1821, and it continued to make generous provision for transient use of slaves by slave owners who happened to own land or businesses in Illinois, something the Matson slave case in 1847 dramatically underscores. Not until 1848 did the Illinois Constitution abolish all forms of slavery outright; but even that did not touch the other forms of semi-slavery that persisted until the eve of the Civil War, including "apprenticeships" and (according to an 1853 statue) sale to the highest bidder "for the shortest period" in lieu of fines. That the Lincoln family might, for a brief time, have hired from a neighbor family the services of a young black women who lived somewhere in the legal limbo short of freedom is more a testimony to the ambiguity of "free" Illinois rather than a Lincolnian hypocrisy.

*Allen C. Guelzo is a professor of American history at Eastern College in St. Davids, Pennsylvania.

James Semple

"That Government of the People, By the People, For the People, Shall Not Perish From the Earth"

Americans were shocked and terribly saddened by the September 11 terrorist attacks. Targeting civilians and using commercial jets as guided missiles, terrorists have forced Americans to rethink national security measures. As Americans adjust to the new realities and challenges posed by terrorists, we would do well to remember Lincoln's warning in his January 27, 1838, "Young Men's Lyceum Address." In it Lincoln discussed the threats to American political institutions: "At what point then is the approach of danger to be expected? I answer, if it ever reach us, it must spring up amongst us. It cannot come from abroad. If destruction be out lot, we must ourselves be its author and finisher." Clearly, Lincoln's point was that as long as Americans remained united and committed to defending the ideals that were expressed in the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution, they could overcome any danger posed by foreign powers. Terrorists may pose new difficulties when devising an appropriate military response, but terrorists cannot triumph as long as Americans remain committed to the ideals that express their political aspirations and values.

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For the People

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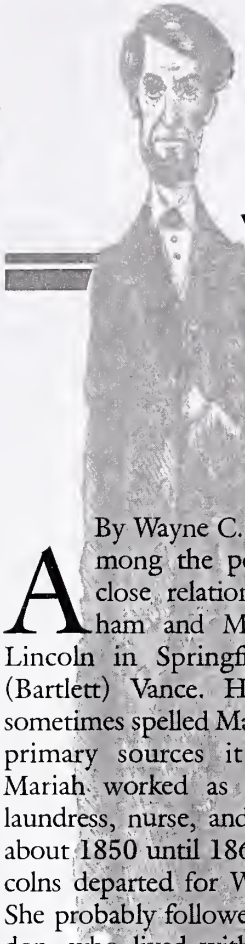

Mariah (Bartlett) Vance

Daytime Servant to the Lincolns

Part 1

By Wayne C. Temple *

Among the people who had a close relationship with Abraham and Mary Ann (Todd) Lincoln in Springfield was Mariah (Bartlett) Vance. Her first name is sometimes spelled Maria.[1] From several primary sources it is known that Mariah worked as a daytime maid, laundress, nurse, and baby-sitter from about 1850 until 1861, when the Lincolns departed for Washington, D.C.[2] She probably followed Catherine Gordon, who lived with the Lincolns in 1850 but on January 7, 1851, married William H. Batterton and, of course, moved out.[3] But Mariah never resided in the Lincoln home. She was already married with several small children and merely commuted from her house on West Washington Street, west of the Springfield Gas Light and Coke Company, which was located on the northwest corner of Washington and First streets.[4] A black woman, Mariah was especially loved by Robert Lincoln, who always relished her corn pone and bacon.[5] Without doubt, she proved to be more subservient to Mary Lincoln's demands and tolerated her volatile mood swings much better than the white girls and "wild Irish," as Mary Lincoln termed some of them.[6] Those girls came to and left the Lincoln home like the seasons. Mariah would have filled in for departed maids or upon occasion augmented the labors of those who were in residence.

Mary Lincoln had grown up in Lexington, Kentucky, where slaves practically raised her. They not only did her bidding but also served as her surrogate mother. Thus she later viewed blacks as servants and yet often confided in them as she had in childhood after her father brought home a stepmother. Throughout her life, Mary depended upon blacks who generally were more docile to her demands. (In a private letter, Mary referred to them as *"darkies."*) Most blacks—even in the North—had descended from slave families that by necessity were forced to "get along" even when their treatment was grossly unfair. As a result, Mariah labored patiently for Mary Lincoln longer than any of her other servants. Even in the White House, Mary found a free mulatto, Elizabeth Keckly, to be an invaluable dressmaker as well as a respected confidant.[7] Of course, Elizabeth was educated, whereas Mariah was illiterate. Mary did not mention Mariah in any existing letters.

Mariah had never been a slave, but her mother, "Phebe" Bartlett, was when she was brought to Illinois by her master, Stephen Shelton. Shelton is not shown in any Illinois Census until 1830, but he purchased land for the first time on April 3, 1825, in what is now Curran Township of Sangamon County and listed his residence as being in that location.[8] Mariah, however, stated that she was born in Round Prairie, four miles east of Springfield in Clear Lake Township of Sangamon County. That perhaps was true. The Sheltons may have stopped in that area before purchasing their own land in Curran Township, southwest of Springfield. Mariah, quite naturally, gave some misinformation in her 1903 interview in matters that she had not witnessed in person. And she greatly exaggerated her age, probably to impress the Old Settlers Association, but by and large her narration is most valuable to Lincoln historians.

Stephen Shelton was born about 1779 in Virginia. There, he married Lydia Heath. They moved to the mouth of the Scioto River in Ohio but later went back to a spot just across the Ohio River in Cabell County in what is now West Virginia. From there Shelton took his family to Illinois. Lydia died on November 20, 1830, and on March 12 of the following year, Stephen married Judith (or Judy) Neall, born in Virginia circa 1804, the daughter of Daniel and Polly (Booth) Neall. Shelton died on January 22, 1859, in Sangamon County. A prolific sire, he fathered twelve children by his first wife and five by his second, who had come to Illinois in 1828.[9]

Mariah truly had no idea in what year her birth had occurred. She only knew that the date was on the "second Sunday in October." She gave the year as 1811, which is not correct. In fact, she related various ages to the census taker over the years. Nevertheless, she was positive that she had been born in Illinois. So, her birth might have taken place sometime between 1820 and 1823 or so, with her sister's a year after hers. That very rough estimate works fairly well with other known facts and calculations. She named her mother as being a "Mrs. Bartlett," but did not identify her father, only stating in 1880 that he had been born in Tennessee. In 1900 she declared his nativity as being in Virginia. The latter seems correct, since the Sheltons came from there. However, the mystery seems to be

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Mariah (Bartlett) Vance

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solved in the finding of a probate record for "Black George" Bartlett in Sangamon County disposing of his personal effects—no real estate—on April 25, 1823. This document shows that he was in Illinois prior to that date. No other black, male Bartlett can be found in the county during these early years in question. It is probable that this man was the "husband" of "Phebe" Bartlett. George must have accompanied the Sheltons to Illinois and fathered one or both daughters shortly before his demise. Mariah and her sister had to have been only babies when he died and never remembered him at all.

[1]She could not read or write as late as one year before her death in 1904. Therefore, she never wrote out her own first name as to spelling which has been given both ways in records. See her interview with a reporter for the *Illinois State Journal* (Springfield), July 13, 1903, p. 5, col. 3. Doug Pokorski discovered this valuable interview and published an article about it in *Heartland Magazine,* an insert for the *State Journal-Register* (Springfield), June [27], 2003, p. 10A.

[2]*Illinois State Journal*, July 13, 1903. "Uncle Joe" Cannon, once Speaker of the United States House of Representatives, reported his conversations with Robert Todd Lincoln and his visit with Robert to see Mariah at Danville in 1896. *Literary Digest,* Aug. 14, 1926, 42. It was not on the 1900 campaign but the 1896.

[3]United States Census, 1850, Springfield, Sangamon County, Ill., p. 120B, l. 35; Marriage License, Sangamon Co.; Temple, *By Square & Compass: Saga of the Lincoln Home* (Mahomet, Ill.: Mayhaven, 2002), 130.

[4]*Williams' Springfield Directory . . . for 1860–61* (Springfield, Ill.: Johnson & Bradford, 1860), 132, 138. They had lived there for several years prior to this listing.

[5]See *Literary Digest,* Aug. 14, 1926, 42.

[6]Justin G. Turner and Linda Levitt Turner, eds., *Mary Todd Lincoln: Her Life and Letters* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1972), 46.

[7]For an excellent study of Mary Lincoln's personality, see Jennifer Fleischner, *Mrs. Lincoln and Mrs. Keckly* (New York: Broadway Books, 2003). For "darkies," see Tuner and Turner, 61.

[8]Mariah's 1903 interview reported that her mother had been a slave owned by S. Shelton. Federal Tract Book No. 68, p. 13, MS., Illinois State Archives. It was the W1/2, SW1/4, Sec. 33, T 15N, R 6 W, 3 P.M., eighty acres for $100. United States Census, 1830, Sangamon County, Ill., p. 14, l. 16.

[9]John Carroll Power, *History of the Early Settlers of Sangamon County, Illinois* (Springfield: Edwin A. Wilson & Co., 1876), 538, 645–647. Power has an error in the birthplace of Shelton and reported the wrong date for his marriage to his second wife. Shelton's true place of birth is taken from the United States Census, 1850, Sangamon County, Ill., p 177B, 11. 19–25, and his marriage to Mrs. Neall from the Sangamon County Marriage Records.

* Wayne C. Temple is the Deputy Director of the Illinois State Archives.

Part 2 will appear in the next issue of *For the People*.

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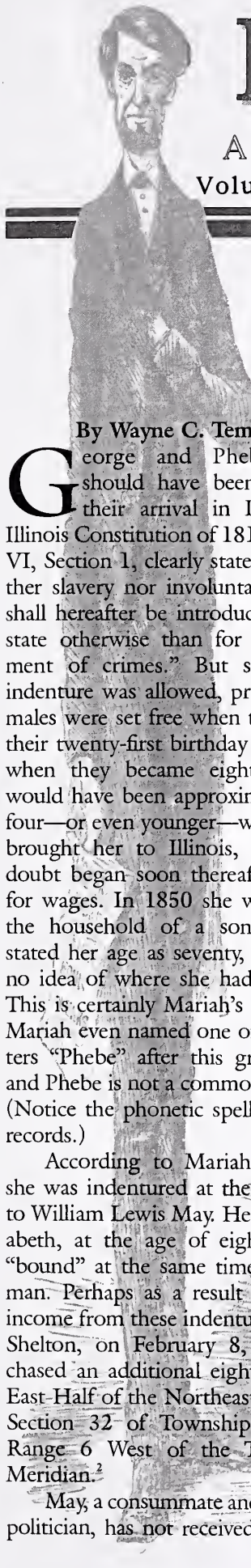

Mariah (Bartlett) Vance
Daytime Servant to the Lincolns
Part 2

By Wayne C. Temple*

George and Phebe Bartlett should have been free upon their arrival in Illinois. The Illinois Constitution of 1818, in Article VI, Section 1, clearly stated that "Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude shall hereafter be introduced into this state otherwise than for the punishment of crimes." But servitude by indenture was allowed, providing that males were set free when they reached their twenty-first birthday and females when they became eighteen. Phebe would have been approximately forty-four—or even younger—when Shelton brought her to Illinois, and she no doubt began soon thereafter to work for wages. In 1850 she was living in the household of a son-in-law and stated her age as seventy, but she had no idea of where she had been born. This is certainly Mariah's mother, and Mariah even named one of her daughters "Phebe" after this grandmother,[1] and Phebe is not a common first name. (Notice the phonetic spelling in these records.)

According to Mariah's interview, she was indentured at the age of nine to William Lewis May. Her sister, Elizabeth, at the age of eight, was also "bound" at the same time to another man. Perhaps as a result of the extra income from these indentures, Stephen Shelton, on February 8, 1832, purchased an additional eighty acres, the East-Half of the Northeast Quarter, in Section 32 of Township 15 North, Range 6 West of the Third Prime Meridian.[2]

May, a consummate and industrious politician, has not received a thorough study of his life. However, research for this study has disclosed the basic facts of his colorful life. He was born in Kentucky in 1793 and removed to Edwardsville in Madison County, Illinois, where he registered some indentured servants on October 15, 1817.[3] Illinois Territorial Governor Ninian Edwards, a Democrat, appointed him Justice of the Peace for Madison County on December 10, 1817.[4] In 1818 a census taker set him down as a free white male, twenty-one years and older, with two other whites in his household, together with two slaves.[5] Two years later he had only one slave.[6] On January 28, 1822, he received a commission as Captain in the Eighth Infantry Regiment of Madison County's Illinois State Militia.[7] A Jacksonian Democrat and unmarried, May proved to be a wily politician with a rather unsavory reputation in Edwardsville. While living there he was indicted for "burglary" when caught in the house of a married woman who seems to have invited him there for a sexual encounter. May admitted the seduction but revealed that the charge of "burglary" had been entered in the arrest record rather than state that the true charge was illicit intercourse. The case was later dropped and May wrote, "in early manhood I have committed many follies and indiscretions." In another legal indictment May paid the complaining witness to depart from Illinois.[8]

Evidently to escape his tarnished image, May left for Morgan County. He was there by 1827, because on September 6 of that year he was commissioned a Justice of the Peace in Jacksonville.[9] He also served as a Representative from Morgan County in the Sixth Illinois General Assembly (1828–1830). He resigned his Justice of the Peace commission on August 29, 1829, after having moved to Springfield, Sangamon County, where he had begun his duties as Register of the Federal Land Office on August 8, 1829, an appointment from President Andrew Jackson.[10] The 1830 Census found him there with one male under the age of five; one from ten to fifteen; and one from thirty to forty years of age. In his family were also one female under five; one from ten to fifteen; and two from twenty to thirty years of age. There was no mention of any indentured servants or "colored" persons.[11]

Yet by 1831 or so he certainly had acquired the indentured services of Mariah Bartlett. In Springfield, May's career began to blossom and expand greatly. In February of 1833 he became the partner of Stephen Trigg Logan, but there is no record that he was a licensed attorney! Then he was elected to Congress as a Representative from District Three, which included Springfield. He served three consecutive terms: 1833–1835; 1835–1837; and 1837–1839 as a Democrat. But in 1839 John Todd Stuart, a Whig, succeeded him for one term. While in Congress May met and married Caroline Rodney, just seventeen, the daughter of the late United States Senator Caesar Augustus Rodney (1772–1824). William A. Wiggins, on December 27, 1837, performed the ceremony in Wilmington, Delaware, home of the bride.[12] Caroline was one of fifteen Rodney children.

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As the money rolled in, May, on December 27, 1833, purchased eight tracts of School Land in Morgan County.[13] He also desired to become a delegate to the Democratic Convention to nominate a presidential candidate, but the Illinois State Senate vetoed that resolution on February 12, 1835.[14]

When the 1840 Census was taken in Springfield, the enumerator discovered that May had a number of male and female members in his family in addition to one person of color—that would have been Mariah.[15] While a bond servant of May, she had joined the Zion Missionary Baptist Church in Springfield in April of 1838. Mariah was probably about fifteen or sixteen. Eighteen blacks assembled at the home of Anderson Carter on West Washington Street to start the "Colored Baptist Church," and Mariah was a founding member at this first meeting.[16] She recalled that "Mr. May, the man who raised me, was one of the kindest hearted men in the world." Mariah worked as a servant in the house and May never sent her out to work in the fields.[17] With such kindness and understanding May certainly had no objection to her attending church services. He may have even encouraged it.

An entrepreneur of the first order, May sought profitable business enterprises and used his political influence to obtain them. He received authorization from the Illinois General Assembly to establish a ferry at the outlet of Lake Peoria. His charter was to run for fifteen years, beginning May 1, 1840, and it could be passed on to his heirs or assigns.[18] And the following year, he ran for mayor of Springfield, was elected, and commissioned not only mayor but also Justice of the Peace on April 26, 1841.[19] He served as mayor for one year.

On January 20, 1842, Mariah Bartlett married Henry Vance, a black laborer residing in Springfield. Reverend John G. Bergen, a Presbyterian, performed the ceremony.[20] Henry was about twenty-five years of age and had been born in Ohio, thus free by being born in part of the Northwest Territory.[21] As a wedding present, Elizabeth (Smith) Todd (April 18, 1793–March 11, 1865), wife of Dr. John Todd, who was the uncle of the soon-to-be Mrs. Abraham Lincoln, gave Mariah a nice wooden stand for her new home. She cherished that piece of furniture and vowed never to part with it—she still owned it in 1903.[22] If Mary Lincoln had ever given Mariah any artifacts or furniture, the latter would certainly have mentioned that fact. Such a bequest would have been considered much more valuable in 1903 than a small stand from Elizabeth Todd!

The reason that John and Elizabeth Todd knew Mariah so well is easy to explain. At approximately the same time that Mariah was indentured to May, Mariah's sister, Elizabeth (called "Betsy") was bound to John Todd (April 27, 1787–January 9, 1865). Mariah even hinted that she might also have worked at times for the Todds before her marriage.[23]

A respected physician, John Todd graduated from Transylvania and then attended the University of Pennsylvania where he received his M.D. degree. He came from his home near Lexington to Edwardsville in 1817. In 1827 President John Quincy Adams, a Whig, appointed Todd as Register in the Federal Land Office at Springfield, and he immediately moved there. However, President Andrew Jackson, a Democrat, removed him in 1829 and replaced him with May, a fellow Democrat—simply a political removal. A religious man, Todd was a Ruling Elder in the First Presbyterian Church.[24] In those days, physicians often dabbled in politics.

As soon as Elizabeth Bartlett reached eighteen she was released from her indenture. She married Henry W. Baylor on April 30, 1846.[25] Baylor, a man of color, was a respected professional barber, and at the time of his marriage was about twenty-four years of age. In 1850 he had "Phebe" Bartlett in his household, perhaps indicating that he was more able to provide for his mother-in-law financially than was Henry Vance, her other son-in-law.[26] Vance earned his living as a "laborer," while Baylor stood out as a leader in his community. He was a member of the Negro School Committee and resided on the north side of Washington Street, west of the gas works. That was in the same neighborhood where Mariah and Henry Vance lived. Baylor had his barbershop under the St. Nicholas Hotel, where he probably served many travelers and numerous gentlemen of Springfield.[27] Latter, he formed a partnership with Henry Ellis Jr.[28] Mariah vouched that after she and "Betsy" arrived at the age of eighteen, they continued to see and work for both the Todds and the Lincolns. Both knew the children of these two families and loved them all.[29]

May continued his business adventures after Mariah left his household as a free woman. He departed from Springfield to operate his ferry service at Peoria, leaving behind a large amount of debt. Beginning early in his life, May had lent money and borrowed even more to finance his ventures. In addition to his ferry line, he sought and received permission in 1845 to construct a toll bridge across the Illinois River at the point where his ferry operated.[30] When his Springfield creditors sued in court to retrieve their loans in 1845, J. E. Carter, a constable in Peoria County, replied when served that he could not seize any of May's property, because he could not find any that he owned in Peoria![31]

With creditors closing in on him and no means of repaying them, May borrowed $500 from Ellen Rodney, an in-law, and departed for California, supposedly—as later reported—follow-

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ing the gold rush there. He signed a note on April 1, 1849.[32] Without doubt he set out sometime after this transaction. It is certain that he went down the Illinois and Mississippi to the Gulf of Mexico where he took a steamer and then crossed the Isthmus of Panama overland where other steam ships picked up passengers for the final leg of the long journey to California. From a letter that May sent back to Springfield, he mentioned his "passage" to San Francisco where he had arrived safely.[33] But that "City by the Bay" was not his final destination. No, he proceeded to Sacramento where he died on September 29, 1849. (An editor speculated that the fatigue of the long land trek across the Isthmus had weakened him physically.) May was buried there the following day, leaving behind his many debts. Even his four traveling companions had been unable to repay him for their passage.[34] The long suffering widow found that her departed husband had left no will, and the courts and administrators were still struggling with the estate as late as 1874.[35] Caroline (Rodney) May had come west to live with her husband, and yet their three children, Rodney, William Jr., and Florence, were all born in Delaware, indicating that she went home each time for her confinements.[36]

Mary Lincoln attempted always to keep a hired girl living with her at Eighth and Jackson, yet she was often without help. Only a few of them are positively known, because they were in the house when the census was taken. Mary N. Johnson was there in 1860,[37] and Catherine Gordon has been mentioned previously.

Within the first year of her marriage, Mariah's first child, William H., was born. When she started to assist Mary Lincoln with the housework, she perhaps had five young children. In 1850, there were William, age eight; Ellen, seven; Catherine six; Phebe, four; and Julia nine months.[38] In all, she would bear thirteen babies, of which only five grew to maturity.[39]

Mariah began her numerous services to the Lincoln household about 1850 or even earlier. As she told a reporter in 1903, she had worked hard all her life. It would have been most difficult to leave her very small offspring at home and travel from the north side of Washington Street, between Klein and Rutledge (west of the Springfield Gas Light and Coke Company) to the Lincoln residence. Perhaps she took the youngest ones with her. She may have had a horse or mule with a cart. We know that Mariah encouraged education for her growing family and sent them to school. Census reports confirm this statement, so the older ones were probably at school during the day.

Only Robert Lincoln publicly mentioned Mariah Vance and recalled her fine cooking for them. Quite often Mary Lincoln suffered from severe headaches or other maladies that necessitated Mariah taking over the kitchen as well as performing other vital household chores. Fondly, Robert remembered how she had made tasty corn pone and bacon for him and also nursed him in boyhood sickness.[40]

In 1860 the Vances were still living at their usual location. Henry continued to earn his living as a laborer, but he now possessed $800 in real estate and $50 in personal property. Since the 1850 Census, Mariah had given birth to Narcissa, age eight; Rosa, five; John L., four; Cornelius, three; and Walter, four months. However, Walter died on July 9, 1863, and was buried in Hutchinson Cemetery.[41]

Mariah continued to serve the Lincolns until they leased the house in preparation for the move to Washington, D.C. President-elect Lincoln rented the homestead to Lucian Tilton on February 8, 1861.[42] To prepare for their departure, Lincoln hired Mariah to pack up their belongings, clean the entire house, close all the windows tightly, and lock all the doors. When finished, she delivered the keys to the Chenery House at the northeast corner of Fourth and Washington streets where the Lincolns were staying until their train left Springfield on February 11, 1861. She never again saw Lincoln alive after that date.[43]

During the early war years, the Vances remained at their old address. Henry, listed as "colored," continued to work in Springfield. In 1863 he is duly mentioned in the city directory, which was probably compiled in 1862.[44] But his name disappeared from the 1864 directory. On July 7, 1863, a Vance was buried in Hutchinson Cemetery, but no first name was listed. This could be Henry—the time frame is correct, but the age seems to be in error; perhaps a careless mistake.

In 1865 Mariah witnessed the arrival of Lincoln's body back in Springfield.[45] Nothing more is known of Mariah until the 1869 directory. There she is listed as a widow at the old family residence on Washington Street, between Klein and Rutledge.[46]

Nevertheless, by July 18, 1870, Mariah was living with her oldest son, William H. Vance, in Danville, Vermilion County, Illinois. She kept house for him, since he had no wife or children. When Mariah moved to Danville she took two other sons with her: John, age fourteen, and Cornelius, thirteen, both of whom she put in school. William, age twenty-eight, worked as a barber, owned $400 in real estate and possessed $150 in personal effects.[47] He operated his shop at 79 Main Street.[48]

In 1874 William more clearly identified his business location. He was under the First National Bank, on the northwest corner of Main and the Public Square. His residence was on the northwest corner of Gilbert and Harrison.[49] It can be assumed that his mother, Mariah, was with him at this spot. By 1878 we know that William and Mariah were living on the south-

west corner of Gilbert and Madison.[50] Yet by 1880 William cannot be found. His mother was keeping house by herself. She admitted that she could not read or write but revealed, again, that she had been born in Illinois and was widowed still.[51]

With no 1890 census available, there is a gap in official information. However, land records in Vermilion County indicate in 1891 that Mariah was a landowner. In 1900 Mariah lived as a boarder at 613 Gilbert Street with the family of Mallen Banks, age twenty-one, a widowed black woman with one daughter, Sarah, three years of age. Mariah, no doubt, was helping to run the household, and her son, John L., still single, was residing in this Danville family, too. For a living, he worked as a cook and could read and write English, proving that his schooling had paid dividends. He had not been unemployed at any time that year. Mariah claimed to be ninety years of age, but that certainly was very incorrect.[52] John probably supplied much of the income for this household of four. At a later date, John married Carrie Thomas, daughter of C. John and Maria (Spring) Thomas. She had been born on March 4, 1863, in Lafayette, Indiana. Cancer of the stomach claimed John's life on January 29. 1923. At that time, he was a retired cook and evidently traveled before returning to Danville about 1898. Cornelius supplied the information but knew very little about his own family members, not even the maiden name of his own mother! When death occurred, John was living at 208 West Townsen Avenue in Ward 7 of Danville with Cornelius. Burial was made in Springhill Cemetery at Danville. Carrie Vance died on September 13, 1937, at 1007 Harmon Avenue (Ward 7) in Danville. She, too, was interred in Springhill Cemetery.[53]

Cornelius, in 1900, was reported as the head of his household at 408 Harmon. He had been married fourteen years, having wed Lucy Garrett on March 13, 1886. She had been born in Kentucky, but her parents stemmed from Virginia. Both Lucy and Cornelius could read and write English. A businessman, Cornelius at that time ran a private laundry—certainly as a sideline—and had not been unemployed that year. It must be noted that the 1900 Danville directory, which was beyond doubt compiled in the preceding year, listed him on page 268 as a cook residing at 408 Harmon Avenue. That must have been his primary occupation. Perhaps Mariah actually ran the laundry for him. And the following year, the directory showed Cornelius (sometimes called "Neal") living at the same address but employed as a laborer.[54]

[1]United States Census, 1850, Springfield, Sangamon County, Ill., p. 90A, l. 3; p. 97A, ll. 6–12; United States Census, 1880, Danville, Vermilion County, Ill., p. 370D, l. 38; Probate Record No. 14, Illinois Regional Archives Depository (IRAD), University of Illinois at Springfield.

[2]Federal Tract Book No. 68, p. 118, MS, Illinois State Archives, Springfield.

[3]Madison County Records and Indentures, 1813–1815, MS, Illinois State Archives.

[4]Clarence Edwin Carter, ed., *The Territorial Papers of the United States, 1814–1818* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1950), 665.

[5]Margaret Cross Norton, ed., *Illinois Census Returns, 1810, 1818,* Collections of the Illinois State Historical Library, Vol. 24 (Springfield: Illinois State Historical Library, 1935), 121.

[6]Norton, ed., *Illinois Census Returns, 1820,* Collections of the Illinois State Historical Library, Vol. 26 (Springfield: Illinois State Historical Library, 1934), 150.

[7]Executive Record, 1818–1832, I, 51, MS, Illinois State Archives.

[8]Paul M. Angle, *"Here I Have Lived"* (Springfield, Ill.: Abraham Lincoln Association, 1935), 60–61.

[9]Justices of the Peace 1809–1864, p. 820, MS, Illinois State Archives.

[10]Springfield Letter Book A, 1829–1847, No. 72, n.p., MS, General Land Office, Illinois State Archives.

[11]United States Census, 1830, Sangamon County, Ill., p. 184, l. 16.

[12]*Sangamo Journal* (Springfield), Feb. 9, 1833, p. 3, col. 3, Jan. 20, 1838, p. 2, col. 7.

[13]School Land Patent Records, MS, Illinois State Archives.

[14]*Journal of the Senate of the State of Illinois* (Vandalia: J. Y. Sawyer, 1835), 511.

[15]United States Census, 1840, Springfield, Sangamon County, Ill., p. 5, l. 22.

[16]*1838–1988: 150th Anniversary Souvenir Journal . . . of Zion Baptist Church . . . Springfield, Illinois* (Springfield, 1988), 3.

[17]*Illinois State Journal,* July 13, 1903.

[18]*Laws of the State of Illinois . . . Eleventh General Assembly* (Springfield: William Walters, 1840), 49–51.

[19]Election Returns, XLVII, 45; Executive Record 1837–1843, III, 255, MS, Illinois State Archives.

[20]Marriage License No. 2624, County Clerk's Office, Springfield.

[21]United States Census, 1850, Springfield, Sangamon County, Ill., p. 97A, l. 6.

[22]*Illinois State Journal,* July 13, 1903.

[23]*Ibid.*

[24]Power, 715–17.

[25]Marriage License, Sangamon Co.

[26]United States Census, 1850, Springfield, Sangamon County, Ill., p. 89B, l. 40, p. 90A, ll. 1.

[27]*Illinois State Journal,* June 14, 1850, p. 3, col. 1; *Williams' Springfield Directory . . . for 1860–61* (Springfield, Ill.: Johnson & Bradford, 1860), 53.

[28]*Illinois State Journal,* Feb. 25, 1860, p. 2, col. 4.

[29]Ibid., July 13, 1903.

[30]*Laws of the State of Illinois . . . the Fourteenth General Assembly* (Springfield: Walters & Weber, 1845), 237–38. In 1847 the law was amended to allow May "and his associates" to build the toll bridge. *Private and Special Laws of the State of Illinois . . . Fifteenth General Assembly* (Springfield: Charles H. Lanphier, 1847), 9–10. So, May needed more capital than he personally had and sought outside money. Then he got legislation passed to empower the Peoria City Council to issue stock not to exceed $10,000 for this project. Ibid., 120.

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[31]Probate Files of Wm. L. May Estate, Peoria County Records, IRAD, Western Illinois University. One note alone was for $966.05.

[32]*Ibid.*

[33]*Illinois Daily Journal,* Dec. 3, 1849, p. 3, col. 1.

[34]*Ibid.*; *Peoria Democratic Press,* Jan. 2, 1850, p. 2, col. 5.

[35]Probate Files of Wm. L. May Estate. A court in Sacramento also had to deal with this matter.

[36]United States Census, 1850, City of Peoria, Peoria County, Ill., p. 165B, 11. 32–36.

[37]United States Census, 1860, Springfield, Sangamon County, Ill., p. 140, 1. 21.

[38]United States Census, 1850, Springfield, Sangamon County, Ill., p. 97A, 11. 6–12, taken Oct. 25, 1850. The census takers consistently spelled Phoebe as "Phebe."

[39]United States Census, 1900, Danville Township, Vermilion County, Ill., Dist. 73, Ward 5, sheet 2, 11. 80–83.

[40]*Literary Digest,* Aug. 14, 1926, 42.

[41]United States Census, 1860, Springfield, Sangamon County, Ill., p. 510, 11. 37–40, p. 511, 11. 1–7; *Williams' Springfield Directory . . . for 1860–61* (Springfield, Ill.: Johnson & Bradford, 1860), 138; Hutchinson Cemetery Records, MS, Boardman and Smith Funeral Directors, Springfield, Ill.

[42]Temple, *By Square & Compass: Saga of the Lincoln Home* (Mahomet: Mayhaven Pub., 2002), 139.

[43]*Illinois State Journal,* July 13, 1903.

[44]*Springfield City Directory 1863* (Springfield, Ill.: Campbell & Richardson, 1863), 131.

[45]*Illinois State Journal,* July 13, 1903.

[46]*Springfield City Directory for 1869–70* (Springfield, Ill.: Daily State Register, 1869), 171. No directory entries can be found for dates between 1864 and 1869.

[47]United States Census, 1870, Danville, Vermilion County, Ill., p. 138B, 11. 29–32, taken July 18, 1870.

[48]*Toledo, Wabash & Western Railway Gazetteer and Directory* (Detroit: Burch & Polk, 1872), 250.

[49]*Jenks & Seely's Danville Directory, 1874–75* (Danville, Ill.: Jenks & Seely, 1874), 29, 67.

[50]*Emerson & McWhinney's Danville Directory 1878–'79* (Danville, Ill.: Commercial Steam Printing, 1878), 116.

[51]United States Census, 1880, Danville, Vermilion County, Ill., p. 370D, 1. 38, taken June 10, 1880.

[52]Deed records courtesy of Chuck Hand of Paris, Illinois; United States Census, 1900, Danville, Vermilion County, Ill., Ward 5 Sheet 2, 11. 80–83, taken June 1, 1900.

[53]Death Record No. 3475 for John, and 483 for Carrie, Vermilion Co.

[54]United States Census, 1900, Danville, Vermilion County, Ill., Ward 6, Sheet 9, 11. 28–35; Vermilion County, Marriage Record, D, 119.

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Part 3 will appear in the next issue of *For the People*.

For the People

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Mariah (Bartlett) Vance
Daytime Servant to the Lincolns
Part 3

By Wayne C. Temple *

For some unknown reason, Mariah left the 613 Gilbert Street address and by 1902 or 1903 was living at 510 Gilbert Street with her son William H., the barber. John worked as a cook at 16 East Main and resided at 802 Oak. However, by the summer of 1903, Mariah had returned to Springfield to live with her daughter, Rosa, who, at age seventeen, had married George Wilson in Sangamon County on August 1, 1872.[1] Rosa had been born in Springfield on April 15, 1855, and seems to have shifted domiciles from there to Danville and back. Her husband died at the age of fifty-two in Springfield on February 27, 1891, leaving Rosa a widow with five children.[2] She next married William Noah Chandler in Vermilion County on August 3, 1895.[3] By 1900, however, Rosa had become a widow once more and returned to live in Springfield at 552 North Third Street.[4] When Mariah went to stay with Rosa, she then resided at 921 East Cass Street in Springfield.[5]

It is certain that Mariah was in Springfield during 1903, because she was living there when she gave an interview to a newspaper reporter on July 12. On the previous day, Mariah had attended a meeting of the Sangamon County Old Settlers Association held in the office of Judge George W. Murray at Springfield. She spoke to the assembled group and proclaimed in a boastful manner that she was the oldest living person born in Sangamon County. She related that in the previous year she had begun to learn the alphabet as a preliminary step to mastering the art of reading. But as yet she had only learned the alphabet. In addition, she told the audience that she had never worn eyeglasses. And she walked several blocks a day for exercise. Mariah also looked forward to the Old Settler picnic to be held later that year. Of course, Mariah was not ninety-two years of age as she claimed. Yet she was up in years and about eighty at that time.[6]

At some time after this important newspaper interview in 1903, Mariah went back to Danville to live at 1035 Robinson Street with her son, Cornelius, who worked at various jobs: cook, janitor, porter, etc. (William had died on January 16, 1904, according to cemetery records.) There, Mariah died on December 23, 1904, at 4 P.M., after having a week before suffered a stroke that paralyzed her left side. Her obituary appeared on the front page of the local newspaper, a rare honor for a person of color in that era. The editor proclaimed that Mariah Vance had been "so well known to many in the city," and proceeded to relate numerous tales about her that were untrue. For instance, he declared that she had been born in slavery in the South and came north "after the war" "and for years was in the family of Abraham Lincoln." (American history evidently was not a strong suite of the editor.) "No colored woman in Danville was so widely known as the deceased," vouched the editor, "and not one held in higher regard. She was a good woman and a faithful member of the colored Baptist church. Mrs. Vance will be missed by many in this city," continued the writer. It was thought by the newspaper that she was either 105 or 106 years old, another error perpetuated by those who did not actually know her birthday. Among her several children, only John, Cornelius, and Rosa survived her, and they were with her when she died.[7] After appropriate services for a devoted member of the Baptist Church, Mariah's body was interred in an unmarked grave at Springhill Cemetery.

The last of Mariah's children, Rosa (Vance) Wilson Chandler, a widow, passed away at 1112 East Reynolds Street in Springfield on October 7, 1932, at 10:30 P.M. She was buried alone in Oak Ridge Cemetery at Springfield after a funeral in Union Baptist Church. A son, William "Buck" Wilson, and two daughters survived her. Rosa had last worked in October of 1928.[8]

Mariah Vance remained in an unmarked grave in Springhill Cemetery at Danville until Lloyd Ostendorf of Dayton, Ohio, took a deep interest in her history and spearheaded a drive to mark her resting place. Under the auspices of the Ward Hill Lamon Civil War Round Table, a ceremony was held there at 5:30 P.M. on August 12, 1964, with Ostendorf and Reverend Tobias Hutchins giving orations. At that time, a very suitable stone was unveiled to commemorate her services to the Lincoln family. At long last Mariah Vance's contribution to Lincolniana was secured for posterity.[9]

The following interview appeared in the *Illinois State Journal* (Springfield) on July 13, 1903, page five, column three:

OLDEST PERSON BORN IN COUNTY
MRS. MARIA VANCE, AGED COLORED WOMAN RESIDING A 921 EAST CASS STREET, CLAIMS THIS DISTINCTION—RELATES INTERESTING STORY OF HER CONNECTION WITH THE HOUSEHOLD OF ABRAHAM LINCOLN.

The distinction of being the oldest living resident of Sangamon county born within its present limits is claimed

by Mrs. Maria Vance, an aged colored woman who was born in the Round Prairie neighborhood ninety-two years ago [actually, about seventy-nine years ago] and who has resided almost continuously in the county ever since. [Not true—she lived in Danville for many years.] She appeared Saturday [July 11, 1903] at the meeting of the Sangamon County Old Settlers' association in Judge [George W.] Murray's office and made known her claim to the unique distinction.

Mrs. Vance, who is at the present making her home with a daughter, Mrs. Rosa Chandler, 921 East Cass street, is in remarkably good health and retains all her mental faculties as well as physical powers which are missing in many younger people. She is quite nimble and one of her favorite diversions is to take walks of several blocks. However, the very warm weather of the last few days has caused her to vary this part of her daily routine.

The aged woman in telling the story of her life says that she has always had to work hard and that only in the last few years has she had any leisure. She is taking advantage of this spare time to improve her mind. Last year she took up the task of learning to read and so far has mastered the alphabet. She has acquired this degree of learning without the use of spectacles, a device she has never had the necessity to adopt. She declared yesterday [July 12] that she can see as well as she ever could.

Born on Round Prairie.

"Grandma" Vance was born, as she terms it, on the "second Sunday in October," 1811, on Round Prairie. She was never a slave but her mother, Mrs. [Phebe] Bartlett, was in bondage in Virginia and was owned by Si [Stephen] Shelton. When Mr. Shelton removed his family from Virginia to Sangamon county he brought Mrs. Bartlett. Two children were born after the settlement was made, Maria and Betsey [Elizabeth].

Maria at the age of 9 was indentured to William L. May of Springfield. Her sister, Betsey, at the same time was "bound" to Doctor [John] Todd, an uncle of Mary Todd, who became the wife of Abraham Lincoln. She remained in the May family until 18 years old when she was released and from that time worked for wages.

On being released from the indenture the two sisters continued almost continuously to work for the families of Doctor Todd and Abraham Lincoln. "Grandma" Vance, of course, was well acquainted with both the Lincoln and Todd families and she now alludes to the sons and daughters of the doctor as the "children." She played with them eighty years ago, but to her they are still the "children."

Packed Lincoln's Belongings.

Mrs. Vance says that she packed up all the belongings of Abraham Lincoln and his wife when they left for Washington after Mr. Lincoln's election to the presidency. After this was done she cleaned the house, carefully closing the windows and locking the doors when her work was finished. She took the keys to the old Chenery hotel, where Mr. Lincoln was staying, and delivered them to the proprietor, who turned them over to the owner.

"I never saw Mr. Lincoln any more," said Mrs. Vance, sadly, "until they brought him home dead [in May of 1865]." She says Abraham Lincoln was one of the best men in the world. She knew him when he was a struggling young lawyer. His treatment of her was always kind. She says that Doctor Tod[d] was also a good man and was very kind to her sister, who lived in the family from the time she was 8 years old until she was of age.

"Mr. May, the man who raised me, was one of the kindest hearted men in the world," said Mrs. Vance. "I remember one day when he was away from home his son [perhaps Rodney] made me go out into the field and work. I tell you his father got after him when he returned home, for he never would let me work in the field. After that I was never asked to work in the field again."

Frightened by Colored Man.

Mrs. Vance says that she was 10 years old before she ever saw a colored person other than her mother and sister. One day she saw a colored man coming along the road and, fearing that it was an evil being that had come to do her harm, she ran a quarter of a mile to the house and concealed herself.

The aged colored woman treasures highly an old fashioned stand that the wife of Doctor Todd [Elizabeth (Smith)] gave her for a wedding present [in 1842]. She has parted with all the rest of her household furniture but has always clung to the old stand given her by the aunt of the wife of Abraham Lincoln, sixty-seven [sixty-one] years ago. This priceless relic is now at the home of her son, William Vance, who lives in Danville and with whom she made her home several years before she returned to Springfield the last time.

"I have looked on that piece of furniture with a mighty watchful eye," said Mrs. Vance. "I will take care of that old table as long as I live. Nobody can have that while I am alive."

Mrs. Vance will make an interesting figure at the old settlers picnic this year, and will be able to hold her own with all who have stories to tell of the years "before the big snow" [the winter of December 1830 to January 1831].

[1]Various city directories for Danville; Marriage Record, Sangamon County.

[2]*Springfield Sunday Journal*, Mar. 1, 1891, p. 4, col. 5.

[3]Marriage Records, Vermilion County, Ill.

[4]*Polk's Springfield City Directory 1900–1901* (Springfield, Ill.: R. L. Polk & Co., 1900), 120.

[5]*Polk's Springfield City Directory 1902–1903* (Springfield, Ill.: R. L. Polk & Co., 1902), 128.

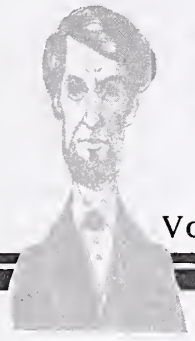
[6]*Illinois State Journal*, July 13, 1903.

[7](Danville) *Commercial-News*, Dec. 24, 1904, p. 1, col. 6.

[8]Sangamon County, Death Record No. 38501; *Illinois State Journal*, Oct. 8, 1932, p. 12, col. 1. She lies in Block 24, Section 3, Range 16, Grave 37. Oak Ridge Cemetery Records.

[9]*Commercial-News*, Aug. 9, 1964, p. 19.

* Wayne C. Temple is the Deputy Director of the Illinois State Archives.



For the People

A Newsletter of the Abraham Lincoln Association

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The Columbus Dispatch
dispatch.com

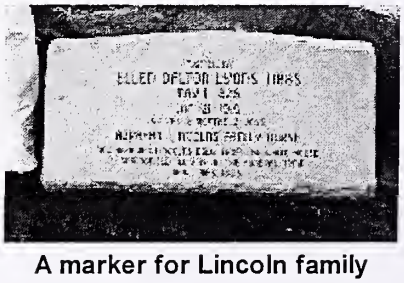
Lincoln nanny honored

Sunday, April 17, 2011 03:15 AM

Until yesterday, the grave of the African-American woman who cared for Abraham Lincoln's children was unmarked. Civil War re-enactors and others unveiled a gravestone to honor the Cincinnati native, who first worked for Mary Todd's family in Kentucky. When Todd and Lincoln wed, she signed on as nanny, nurse and housekeeper, moving with them to Springfield, Ill., and then the White House. She later moved to Circleville.

TESSA BARGAINNIERDISPATCH PHOTOS

Tony Robinson, left, of Circleville, and Terry Whetstone of Springfield, members of the Ohio chapter of Sons of the American Revolution, watch proceedings after unveiling a grave marker for Lincoln family nanny Ellen Dalton Lyons Tibbs. After Lincoln's assassination, Tibbs moved to Circleville to be with her brothers, who were Civil War veterans.



A marker for Lincoln family nanny Ellen Dalton Lyons Tibbs stands in Circleville's Forest Cemetery.

LINCOLN'S DISLIKE OF SERVANTS OUTLINED

A LITTLE known side of Abraham Lincoln—his dislike of servants and domestic attendants—is well brought out in Al and Ray Rockett's highly praised production of "Abraham Lincoln," which is now running at the Roosevelt. Of this phase Al Rockett, one of the two brothers who spent three years making this romantic story of Lincoln's life, says: "Lincoln always relied on himself; his youth spent in poverty taught him that. In Springfield and the White House he would walk after a document, a bottle of ink, a hat, a coat, rather than ask any of the ready attendants to get it.

"If the fireplace needed a log at the Springfield home he would shed his coat, hurry to the woodpile and cut suitable pieces. Once while he was a member of Congress Lincoln was entertaining noted guests at his home in Springfield, when he suddenly rose, went to the woodhouse and got a load of wood. 'We're not much used to servants about this place. Besides, you know, I've always been my own wood sawyer.'

"Lincoln used to worry Mrs. Lincoln almost out of her mind by his indifference to servants. He would go to answer the front door bell in the most unconventional attire, no matter who was calling, and would pay no heed to the rules of the narrow formal etiquette, which she as a Kentucky banker's daughter and haughty society belle of the South thought should be observed.

"Lincoln, even after he became virtually the leader of the bar in Illinois, a member of Congress and nationally famous opponent of Douglas in debate, would milk his own cow night and morning, feed and curry a dilapidated old horse and grease a tottering old buggy in which he rode about the country. No man ever had less pride and more dignity. He never knew conceit, was always humble, yet practically no one ever called him 'Abe' to his face. To all but perhaps four men he was 'Mr. Lincoln.' People instinctively paid him that respect."